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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 004751

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [ECON](#) [TU](#) [RS](#)

SUBJECT: TURCO-RUSSIAN RAPPROCHEMENT: SEVEN HOURS OF
ERDOGAN-PUTIN TALKS IN SOCHI

(U) Classified by Polcounselor John Kunstadter; reasons: E.O.
12958 1.4 (b,d).

1. (C) Summary: In the context of booming trade with Russia (heavily in the latter's favor) and growing emotional understanding between Turks and Russians, PM Erdogan continues to feel that he is building a partnership of equals with Putin. What is lacking in Turkey is any rational analysis of Russia's aims toward Turkey or the political cost of Russia's dominance of natural gas supplies. End summary.

2. (U) Islam-oriented ruling AK party (AKP) used the mostly-captive Turkish media to trumpet PM Erdogan's "private" July 17-18 visit to Putin at Sochi, the two leaders' fourth meeting since December 2004, as a smashing success.

3. (U) The banner headline and photo in July 19 Islamist "Yeni Safak", AKP's de facto party organ, sums up AKP's spin: "Bush Couldn't Have Had This Photo Taken: In their 4.5 hour conversation, Erdogan and Putin took up commercial and political subjects. In contrast to U.S. President Bush, who had his picture with Erdogan taken while sitting down owing to their difference in height, Putin had their picture taken while walking together." The photo, showing Erdogan swaggering with his left hand in his jacket pocket, was used by "Yeni Safak" to project the image of Erdogan as a self-confident equal of Putin.

4. (U) Aside from the July 17 dinner conversation the talks included a July 18 breakfast and an exchange while walking in Putin's garden. Sukru Kucuksahin, a columnist with deep sources in the Turkish State and a reputation for reliable journalism, reports in August 11 "Hurriyet" that Erdogan accepted Putin's offer to accompany him alone (with just two bodyguards) to a party for two and a half hours after the dinner. Kucuksahin reports that Putin tried to ply Erdogan with wine while performer Nikolai Baskov sang.

5. (C) Gaining a detailed readout of the meetings has been complicated by the restricted attendance in the meetings. Erdogan excluded MFA personnel, a point which MFA interlocutors have awkwardly admitted to us. Egemen Bagis, an AKP MP whom Erdogan has normally used as a foreign policy advisor or as a translator to/from English, told us he was excluded from the July 17 dinner. As we understand it, Erdogan continued his practice of avoiding official notetaking on the Turkish side.

6. (S) However, "Yeni Safak"'s coverage, sycophantic as it was, gives us some clues to the thrust of the talks. In addition, we have spoken to Turkey's pre-eminent national security analyst, an exceptionally reliable contact for the past three years. From his 12 years in military intelligence, including assignments in the Prime Ministry, the National Security Council, and the national police academy, he maintains an extensive network in the Prime Ministry and Turkey's three main intelligence organizations. Given that his previous readouts of sensitive meetings have proven exceptionally reliable, we include his summary of the visit based on a readout he got from what appears to be a source in the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (TNIO, which accompanies the Prime Minister's security detail and, as we understand, is in a position to learn the content of meetings through various means).

7. (S) According to our contact's readout, Erdogan took only Energy Minister Guler with him to the dinner; Erdogan allowed the Russians to provide the interpretation both ways. Putin was accompanied by a foreign policy advisor. Erdogan reportedly asked for a reduction in the price of Russian natural gas through the Blue Stream (Black Sea) pipeline. Putin refused, saying that Russia had raised the price for Ukraine and Georgia, and Erdogan should thank him for not raising the price for Turkey. Putin then reportedly pushed for Turkish agreement to extend the Blue Stream pipeline to Israel. Erdogan reportedly agreed, but was rebuffed when he asked for an arrangement under which Turkey would sell the gas to Israel; Putin insisted that Russia sell the gas to Israel and that Turkey take only a transit fee (according to August 10 news reports, Russia's price offer to Israel is below the price Russia charges Turkey). At the same time, hinting that Russia does not look favorably on growth of Ceyhan as an energy hub, Putin reportedly expressed reservations about a Samsun-Ceyhan oil pipeline to bypass the

Straits.

18. (C) On trade, Putin reportedly held out the prospect of raising the current \$10 billion annual two-way trade figure -- heavily in Russia's favor -- to \$25 billion in several years. According to "Yeni Safak", Erdogan expressed thanks for Russia's decision to lift a ban on imports of Turkish fruits and vegetables (Putin had refused to take Erdogan's phone call on the subject a couple of weeks earlier). Putin pressed Erdogan to show political support for Russian investors, including Alfa Group, which has just concluded a murky \$3 billion deal leading to a sizable minority share in Turkey's leading cellphone operator Turkcell, and other companies now interested in the privatization of Turkey's major refinery and leading steel company. Putin also promoted the Kamov, Russia's entry in the long-delayed tender for a major attack helicopter contract.

19. (S) Our national security contact said Putin dangled the possibility of Turkish membership in the Shanghai Five, which Erdogan greeted favorably. Putin reportedly then spoke against U.S. democratization efforts in the Caucasus and Central Asia, calling these efforts a plot to bring destabilization to both regions. He suggested instead to Erdogan that Russia and Turkey cooperate in the Caucasus and Central Asia "according to local conditions." On Cyprus, merely repeating the standard Russian position of support for the UN, Putin made no commitments regarding breaking the isolation of northern Cyprus. Putin reportedly made a vague commitment to cooperate with Turkey on the PKK; in return Erdogan reportedly undertook tighter control of Chechen activities in Turkey.

110. (C) "Yeni Safak" Ankara bureau chief Mustafa Karaalioglu, who accompanied the delegation, told us July 28 that Erdogan was deeply affected by the hospitality and amount of time Putin gave him and dazzled by the allure of a further boom in trade. Karaalioglu described Erdogan as convinced he has established an exceptionally solid rapport with Putin. In Karaalioglu's view Erdogan does not see Putin's drive to increase Russia's already dominant share of natural gas supplies to Turkey or Putin's bid sharply to raise Russia's share of FDI in key sectors such as natural gas distribution, refining, steel and telecoms as having any relevance for Turkey's sovereignty or independence.

111. (C) Comment: For the AKP leadership and for many Turkish businessmen expanding relations with Russia is mainly a matter of making money. Likewise, since bribery and kickbacks are an accepted part of doing business in Turkey, Turkish businessmen see conditions in Russia as normal. Novelty and the prospect of gain attract Turks and distract them from bad memories they would otherwise prefer to dwell on: relations with Russia are new and potentially lucrative in the most material of ways, and thus Turks see no reason to think of what the Russians have done to the Tartars since 1552, what Putin's attitude is toward Muslims, what the Russians are doing in Chechnya.

112. (C) Comment cont'd: There's an emotional component as well. Turks see Russians as a huge and powerful nation that has a right to dominate the Caucasus and Central Asia and shares both a similar sense of having been a great empire now disrespected by the West (the Rappallo syndrome) and a preference for spontaneity, a trait the Turks think is lacking among Westerners. Erdogan sees himself as a world statesman and is influenced by the thick pile of Putin's red carpet.

113. (C) Comment cont'd: What is missing both in AKP and -- with rare exception -- across the Turkish press, academe and think tanks are any rational analyses of Russia's aims toward Turkey or its internal problems. Erdogan seems indifferent to the political ramifications of Russia's dominant position in natural gas supplies and Russia's interest in buying up distribution networks. The press and academe are dominated by leftists who have been unwilling to break their ties to Marxist second- and third-worldism. Moreover, the Dogan group, Turkey's largest media group, wants to protect its bid to open a television station in Russia; "Zaman", Samanyolu TV, and the Writers and Journalists Foundation, the newspaper, TV channel, and professional association of the Islamist movement of Fethullah Gulen, want to protect the Gulen chain of schools in Russia and the Gulen "mission" to convert Russia (and all three have admitted to us that they pull their punches on Russia with these aims in mind); the Cukurova Group, owners of "Aksam", "Tercuman" and SkyTurk TV, wants to protect the interests of its mobile telephone company Turkcell. With rare exception, think tanks are wrapped up in paranoid anti-Western emotionalism (the 1920 Sevres Treaty syndrome) and are attracted by the "Eurasia alternative" to the West.

114. (C) Comment cont'd: As long as Turks see profits ahead, feel awe at Russia's size, respond positively to Putin's masterly stroking of their emotional complexes, and choose to

feel aggrieved by U.S. and EU policies, relations with Russia
will continue to improve.
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